

# Freshman Year

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR  
**SARAH MAI**

SCIS: 5496578

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**RECOMMENDED FOR:** Mid to Upper Secondary  
(Drug and Alcohol References, Sex References)

## SYNOPSIS

*Everyone gets a fresh start. Who do you want to be?*

Sarah is leaving suburban Wisconsin for college in Minnesota. She has high hopes for the future: impress her professors, meet interesting new people, stay close to her best friends and boyfriend back home, flourish as an artist and shed her lingering high school anxieties. What seems manageable at first, quickly unravels into a tailspin and she is overwhelmed by the freedom, the isolation and all the possibilities that await her in this new environment.

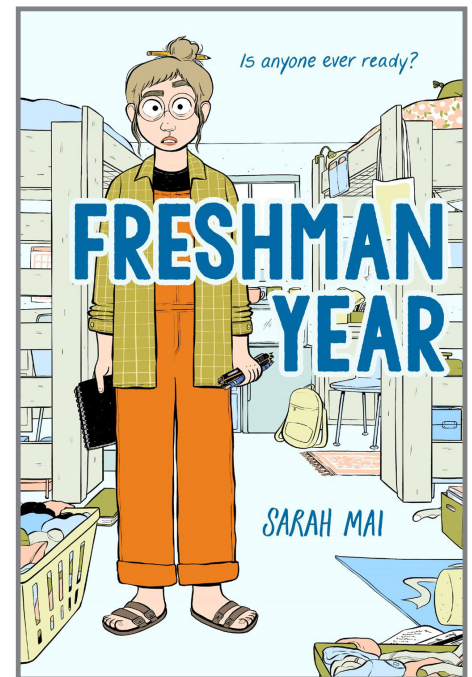
Based on the author's personal college journal and comics, *Freshman Year* navigates the inner workings of an 18-year-old girl.

## ABOUT THE CREATOR

Sarah Mai is an illustrator and writer based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She has a degree in English Literature from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, where she developed a passion for graphic novels. She is the illustrator of *The Cool Code* and *The Cool Code 2.0: The Switch Glitch* written by Deirdre Langeland. *Freshman Year* marks her author/illustrator debut.

## STUDY NOTES

- What books, TV shows or movies have you read or seen that are set in an American college? How does Sarah's experience in *Freshman Year* compare?
  - From what you know, how is an American college experience similar or different to an Australian university?
- *Freshman Year* is a graphic novel. How did this format affect your reading experience and enjoyment of the book? How might it have been different if *Freshman Year* was presented as just prose, without the illustrations?
- Do you think Sarah handles her relationship, and then breakup, with Ben well? Why or why not? What advice would you give to a friend in a similar situation to Sarah?
- How is the theme of friendship explored in *Freshman Year*? In what ways do Sarah's friends support her, and how are her friendships with Finn and Emma back home different to those at college?
- Sarah struggles with facing uncertainty and change. What are some coping strategies she tries, and what are some other possibilities? Have you ever felt like Sarah? If so, how did you handle it?
- How does Sarah change as a character over the course of her first year in college, and through the experiences she has throughout the novel?



- In the epilogue, author Sarah Mai says: 'Sarah leaves these pages going into summer with more questions than answers, with hope and with anxiety, with friendships ahead and beside and behind. Facing head-on whatever lies beyond the horizon: the rest of life.' What do you think the future looks like for Sarah and why?
  - Discuss your ideas with a classmate. How are they similar or different?